

## WHAT ARE SOME WRITING ASSIGNMENTS I CAN USE WITH MY STUDENTS TO PROMPT THINKING OR HELP MY STUDENTS SHOW UNDERSTANDING IN INTERESTING WAYS?

Students do not have to write polished reports in order for an activity to help them learn course content, show understanding or develop their writing skills. Brief, informal writings, for example, can be used by themselves or as a step toward a more formal, polished assignment. The following activities can be adapted to any content area.

**HOT CARDS.** Students are given a note card and instructed to respond to a prompt. If the teacher wants to check for understanding, he or she can instruct students to write three quick sentences summarizing what they learned in class that day, list 10 facts about a topic, write five quiz questions they would like to be asked about the day's lesson, or give a quick explanation of their understanding of a concept. If the teacher wants to find out where students are having difficulties, he or she can instruct students to list any questions they have about the topic, tell about something they don't understand right now, or describe something that confuses them. The teacher can either check the cards after class or can use a few minutes of class time to address questions/comments on the cards with the class. The benefit of using note cards rather than paper is that they can be easily sorted, they limit the amount of information the student needs to provide, and they can be easily stored for later use.

**VENN DIAGRAMS.** Students are given two or more concepts and are told to draw interlocking circles that overlap in some places but are separate in others. They then write in what they know about each concept. They show their understanding of each concept's relationship to other concepts by writing information that is "shared" by concepts in the part of the circles that overlap and the information that is distinct to each concept in the outer part of the circle.

**TELEGRAMS.** Students are instructed to write a telegram summarizing the day's lesson or their understanding of a concept. Because telegrams make an economical use of language, students must choose their words carefully to be concise yet get across meaning.

**ANTICIPATION GUIDES.** An anticipation guide (Burke, 1999) consists of a list of statements about a topic that bring to light differences of opinion. Statements such as the following tend to promote thinking and discussion: "All people are born basically good," "Science gives us definite answers to the questions we ask," "Math requires creativity," "The internet has improved life for everyone," or "Art is only effective when it causes controversy". More specific statements can be designed for any type of unit. The student indicates that he or she either agrees or disagrees with the statement. Next, the student can be asked to write a brief paragraph about the statement that he/she feels the most strongly about. Students then discuss the statements in small groups or as a class.

**LETTERS.** Students write letters between two historical figures, literary characters, or current newsmakers to show not only their understanding of a concept but their ability to see it from more than one perspective.

**CUBING.** Cubing (Mondschein-Leist, 1997) allows a student to consider a subject in six different ways. Students are instructed to visualize a cube with different instructions on how to respond to the subject written on each side. The instructions are as follows: describe it, compare it, associate it, analyze it, apply it, argue for or against it.

**CROSSWORD PUZZLES.** Individually or in pairs students generate crossword puzzles using a list of terms related to a unit of study. Then, they can swap puzzles with other students as a way of reviewing content. The students focus not only on the terms themselves but also on writing the clues in their own words. Puzzles can be created online at <http://www.puzzlemaker.com>.